

'Who's in Charge?'

By Sam Farr

***Good Times*, Santa Cruz, Calif.**

April 2, 2008

Our vice president was recently asked to comment on the fact that two-thirds of Americans say the Iraq war is not worth fighting. He offered his response with a smirk: "So?"

When asked to expand on that glib answer, Dick Cheney continued, "You cannot be blown off course by the fluctuations in the public opinion polls."

And you know what, that's usually a good point. Our national security policy shouldn't be dictated by public opinion polls. We elect leaders to use their best judgment in situations like these. Unfortunately, as we've seen over the past seven years, that's only part of the story.

The fundamental problem with the vice president's argument is that he doesn't seem able to differentiate between a "public opinion poll" and the wholesale rejection of White House policies.

It's also curious that only those opinions that diverge from the White House line are "public opinion polls," a label that is slapped onto anything at odds with the dictates of the administration.

I see two main problems with the position the White House takes on this war, indeed with the very tone it uses to communicate with the public on all issues. First, this administration regularly forgets who put it in power. The positions of president and vice president are two of the most powerful in the world, but the power of those positions lies in the hands of the American public.

Voters on two occasions decided this administration should wield power over the country, but

those appointments came with a lot of stipulations. The president and vice president are tasked with representing the country, carrying out the will of the people. They're not charged with bullying the public and running roughshod over the populace.

For the past seven years, the will of the people has not been represented. Instead we've seen tax cuts for the rich, the politicization of our justice system, the acceptance of torture by government agencies and a \$3 trillion war that our country does not want.

Wait, says the vice president! What about those "fluctuations in the public opinion polls"? That brings me to my second problem with the administration's spin: there haven't been any fluctuations. In fact, as early as August 2003 we saw a 50/50 split in public opinion toward the occupation of Iraq. And since 2005, opposition to the war has hovered around two-thirds, peaking at 70 percent of Americans opposed.

Fluctuations, Cheney snarls. Only 3 in 10 Americans support the occupation of Iraq, but the administration plods along. Milestone after depressing milestone have been passed, most recently the death of the 4,000th American soldier. The price we're paying for this war is beyond imagination.

Even more frightening is the chatter coming from the GOP balcony. John McCain, the Republican nominee for the presidency, says he's willing to stay in Iraq for 100 years. A century of war, trying to bolster democracy in a land that doesn't want us there. Thousands more dead soldiers, trillions more in squandered treasure. It's an image of our future that keeps me awake at night. And of course McCain is also quite chipper about the prospect of bombing Iran.

What can we do about this? We saw last year the power held by the 49 Republican senators. With the Senate's filibuster rule alive and well, the GOP has created an environment where 60 votes are needed to pass just about everything. And there just aren't enough Republican senators willing to cross party lines and represent their constituents.

The House of Representatives has done a little better, passing several bills that would draw down our presence in Iraq and keep the president from expanding his war, but without the Senate on board those efforts have borne little fruit. This year, much of our attention has shifted to attainable goals, like preventing the president from establishing permanent bases in Iraq, one

of his desires.

The bottom line will come in November on Election Day. That's when we'll see the true consequences of the White House actions. Because the president and vice president refuse to listen to the people, they're forcing Americans to wait until November when their votes will be their voices.

I have huge hopes for this election season, when the White House will finally be forced to listen to the millions of Americans it has ignored since 2001.